



# FEMA

## NEWS RELEASE STATE/FEDERAL DISASTER FIELD OFFICE JOINT INFORMATION CENTER



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### **Disasters Are Scary**

#### *Helping Your Children Cope With Stress After a Disaster*

EVERETT, WA – Children are particularly vulnerable to emotional stress after a disaster like the flooding and high winds that Washington residents have been experiencing recently. They may suffer symptoms such as excessive fear of the dark, crying, fear of being alone and constant worry. According to experts, parents or guardians should reassure children they are safe; encourage them to talk about their fears; emphasize they are not responsible for what happened; and hold and hug them frequently.

“The emotional consequences of a disaster can be far-reaching and long lasting for everyone, especially children,” said Diane Offord, state coordinating officer for the disaster. “Stress can surface in many forms and often appears weeks or months following a traumatic event.”

Adult disaster victims may experience emotional responses such as anger, fatigue, loss of appetite, sleeplessness, nightmares, depression, inability to concentrate, hyperactivity and increased alcohol or drug use.

Mental health experts suggest that all victims of disasters talk about their feelings with family, friends and neighbors. Sharing common experiences helps people deal with and overcome anxiety and feelings of helplessness. Getting children back into their daily routines as soon as possible, trying to maintain a healthy diet, and making sure they are getting plenty of sleep are also helpful.

Keeping stress levels down as the recovery process continues is no easy task. “It isn’t going to be the way it was,” said Anthony Russell, coordinating officer for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). “It helps if people stay connected to each other during the sometimes exhausting recovery process.”

Children can go to the FEMA website at [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov) and link to “FEMA for Kids” then click on “Disaster Connection – Kids to Kids” to read what others their age have to say about the disasters they have experienced. They can also add their stories and/or artwork to the website to help others.

On March 1, 2003, FEMA became part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. FEMA’s continuing mission within the new department is to lead the effort to prepare the nation for all hazards and effectively manage federal response and recovery efforts following any national incident. FEMA also initiates proactive mitigation activities, trains first responders, and manages the National Flood Insurance Program and the U.S. Fire Administration.

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**Note to Editors:** Disaster information is available on FEMA’s World Wide Web at <http://www.fema.gov> or the Washington Emergency Management Division at <http://emd.wa.gov>